

United States Senate

July 9, 2019

Mr. Hugh Hurwitz
Acting Director
Federal Bureau of Prisons
320 First Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20534

Dear Mr. Hurwitz:

I write to express my serious concerns about the Bureau of Prisons (BOP) Federal Correctional Institution in Mendota, California (FCI Mendota).

On June 17, my staff visited FCI Mendota to evaluate the condition and performance of the facility. During that visit, FCI Mendota employees reported severe staffing shortages. According to *The Sacramento Bee*, FCI Mendota is at about 60 percent of its recommended staffing levels.¹ Some staff members claim to be working 16 hours shifts to make up for these shortages. As you know, staffing shortages place staff and inmates alike at greater risk of harm. These shortages must be taken seriously and redressed as quickly as possible.

FCI Mendota employees also described recurring problems with the facility's air conditioning units. For the third consecutive year, the air conditioning has failed during the summer, when temperatures can exceed 100 degrees. During their site visit, my staff was informed of broken air conditioning units in the Satellite Prison Camp Administration Building. And the facility manager reported that it takes two weeks to repair broken air conditioning systems. The poor condition of FCI Mendota's air conditioning units—coupled with the two week repair time—puts lives at risk and undermines the safety of the entire institution.

Employees also reported delayed responses to other repair issues. On December 29, 2016, an employee reported a water leak that ultimately went unresolved for months. The facility manager at FCI Mendota took no action until *The Fresno Bee* published an article about the leak on June 6, 2018—almost a year and a half after the initial report.² When the leak was finally addressed, employees identified toxic black mold and alleged that they were required to remove the mold without any protective equipment.

In June 2018, an employee reported another major water leakage at the facility. That report went unaddressed for months. Then, in February 2019, the water leak became so severe that ceiling tiles were falling in the law library and lighting and electrical devices were compromised.

¹ Kate Irby, *It's 100 Degrees in California and This Prison's Air Conditioning is Broken, Again*, THE SACRAMENTO BEE (June 6, 2019), <https://www.sacbee.com/news/politics-government/article230983958.html>.

² Lewis Griswold, *Prison Guards Say Toxic Mold is Making Them Sick. Warden Says All is OK*, THE FRESNO BEE (June 6, 2018), <https://www.fresnobee.com/news/local/article212272979.html>.

These conditions pose a grave threat to the health and safety of correctional officers, inmates, and staff. To understand how BOP is addressing the situation at FCI Mendota, I respectfully request that you respond to the following questions by **Wednesday, July 17, 2019**.

1. Based on the inmate population at FCI Mendota, what is the recommended number of full-time staff for the facility?
2. How many correctional officers and staff are currently employed at FCI Mendota?
3. Describe BOP's plan to increase staffing at FCI Mendota to recommended levels, as well as the timeline for completion.
4. State whether, as of the date of this letter, the air conditioning has been repaired at FCI Mendota's Satellite Prison Camp Administration Building.
5. State whether, as of the date of this letter, there are broken air conditioning units in any other building within FCI Mendota.
6. Describe BOP's plan to improve the functioning of air conditioning units at FCI Mendota, as well as the timeline for completion.
7. Describe any training, guidelines, or instructions given to FCI Mendota's facility manager regarding the process and timeline for handling repair requests.

I look forward to your prompt response to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Kamala D. Harris".

KAMALA D. HARRIS
United States Senator